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In which a Family reunion occasions certain personal recriminations; assorted events are set in motion; and a relationship thought long done with proves to have much relevance today.

SUGGESTED FOR MATURE READERS

THE

SANDMAN™

SEASON OF MISTS 0

gaiman dringenberg jones III

WALK ANY PATH IN DESTINY'S GARDEN, AND YOU WILL BE FORCED TO CHOOSE, NOT ONCE BUT MANY TIMES.

THE PATHS FORK AND DIVIDE. WITH EACH STEP YOU TAKE THROUGH DESTINY'S GARDEN, YOU MAKE A CHOICE; AND EVERY CHOICE DETERMINES FUTURE PATHS.

HOWEVER, AT THE END OF A LIFETIME OF WALKING YOU MIGHT LOOK BACK, AND SEE ONLY ONE PATH STRETCHING OUT BEHIND YOU; OR LOOK AHEAD, AND SEE ONLY DARKNESS.

SOMETIMES YOU DREAM ABOUT THE PATHS OF DESTINY, AND SPECULATE, TO NO PURPOSE.

DREAM ABOUT THE PATHS YOU TOOK AND THE PATHS YOU DIDN'T TAKE...

THE PATHS DIVERGE AND BRANCH AND RECONNECT; SOME SAY NOT EVEN DESTINY HIMSELF TRULY KNOWS WHERE ANY WAY WILL TAKE YOU, WHERE EACH TWIST AND TURN WILL LEAD.

BUT EVEN IF DESTINY COULD TELL YOU, HE WILL NOT.

DESTINY HOLDS HIS SECRETS.

THE GARDEN OF DESTINY. YOU WOULD KNOW IT IF YOU SAW IT. AFTER ALL, YOU WILL WANDER IT UNTIL YOU DIE.

OR BEYOND.

FOR THE PATHS ARE LONG, AND EVEN IN DEATH THERE IS NO ENDING TO THEM.

CONVERSION BY WILDSTORM

DESTINY OF THE ENDLESS IS THE ONLY ONE WHO UNDERSTANDS THE GARDEN'S PECULIAR GEOGRAPHY, DISTINCT FROM TIME AND SPACE, WHERE THE POTENTIAL BECOMES THE ACTUAL.

DESTINY KNOWS. THE BOOK HE CARRIES IS AS MUCH A GUIDE TO THE GARDEN AS IT IS TO THE MINUTIAE OF FUTURE-PAST.

DESTINY HAS NO PATH OF HIS OWN. HE MAKES NO DECISIONS, PICKS NO BRANCHING WAYS; HIS WAY IS LAID OUT, DRAWN AND DEFINED, FROM THE BEGINNING OF TIME TO THE END OF EVERYTHING.

GREETINGS TO YOU, *DESTINY* OF THE *ENDLESS*.

GREETINGS TO YOU, YOU WHO ARE *NOT* OF MY CHILDREN.

GREETINGS.

AND GREETINGS TO YOU *ALSO*, GREY LADIES. TO WHAT DO I OWE THIS VISIT?

A *KING* WILL FORSAKE HIS KINGDOM.

LIFE AND *DEATH* WILL CLASH AND FRAY.

THE *OLDEST BATTLE* BEGINS ONCE MORE.

WHY? WE ARE *HERE* BECAUSE *THIS* IS WHERE WE *MUST* BE AT THIS TIME, MY DEARIE-DOVE.

LOOK IN YOUR *BOOK*, OLD DRY-AS-DUST.

AND *ALL* THESE THINGS HAVE THEIR GENESIS *HERE*, IN YOUR *GARDEN*.

NOTHING BEGINS IN THIS PLACE.

THIS PLACE IS **BEYOND** BEGINNINGS AND ENDINGS, GREY WOMEN.

REALLY? **EVERYTHING** HAS TO START **SOMEWHERE**... AND **HERE** IS AS GOOD A PLACE AS ANY.

EVERYTHING CREATED HAS A **BEGINNING**, DESTINY OF THE ENDLESS...

...AS EVERYTHING CREATED HAS AN **END**.

AND THEY ARE GONE.

HEEHEEHEEHEEHEEHEE

DISTURBED, IN A MANNER HE WOULD FIND ALMOST IMPOSSIBLE TO ARTICULATE, DESTINY RETURNS TO HIS STRONGHOLD.

EXAMINING HIS BOOK, HE FINDS THE ENCOUNTER WITH THE THREE WOMEN OUTLINED THERE IN EVERY DETAIL.

READING ON, HE KNOWS WHAT HE MUST DO.

DESTINY HAS TO CALL A FAMILY MEETING.

SEASON of MISTS: a prologue

In which a Family reunion occasions certain personal recriminations; assorted events are set in motion; and a relationship thought long done with proves to have much relevance today.

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SISTER. I STAND IN MY GALLERY, AND I SUMMON THE FAMILY TO ME. IT IS I, DESTINY OF THE ENDLESS, WHO CALLS YOU.

COME.

SATISFIED?

YES. I AM SATISFIED.

HIYA, BIG BROTHER. WHAT'S UP?

I AM CALLING A CONCLAVE OF THE ENDLESS, SISTER. DO YOU NOT FEEL YOU SHOULD BE MORE APPROPRIATELY ATTIRED?

AW, C'MON. YOU KNOW HOW MUCH I HATE WEARING THAT STUFF...

...NEXT THING YOU'RE GOING TO BE MOANING THAT I OUGHT TO GET A SCYTHE...

SISTER...

BROTHER DREAM. IT IS I, DESTINY OF THE ENDLESS WHO CALLS YOU. THE FAMILY MUST MEET.

COME TO ME.

Hmm. Well met, my brother.

So: a family meeting ... the first since the prodigal announced his intention to leave us.

Well, well. It will be interesting to find out why you have called us here.

INTERESTING? PERHAPS. FOR YOU MORE THAN ANY OF US, MY BROTHER.

BUT IN GOOD TIME THERE ARE THREE MORE OF US STILL TO COME.

Well-met, sister.

You have dressed formally also, I see. My compliments.

A FAMILY MEETING, EH, DESTINY?

YOU HAVEN'T REDECORATED IN THE LAST 300 YEARS, I SEE. OH WELL. AND *STILL* WEARING BASIC GRAY...

SO, *WHAT'S* THE OCCASION?

DESTINY WILL TELL US THAT IN HIS OWN TIME, DESIRE. HE WON'T BE RUSHED...

ONLY *TWO* OF US LEFT TO GO, THEN.

ONLY ONE OF US WHO WILL BE ATTENDING THIS GATHERING, *DESPAIR.*

WHEREVER THE *OTHER* IS, *HE* HAS MADE *HIS* WISHES ON THE MATTER *PERFECTLY* CLEAR.

YEAH, BUT I HAD KINDA HOPED HE'D CHANGED HIS MIND. I *MISS* HIM.

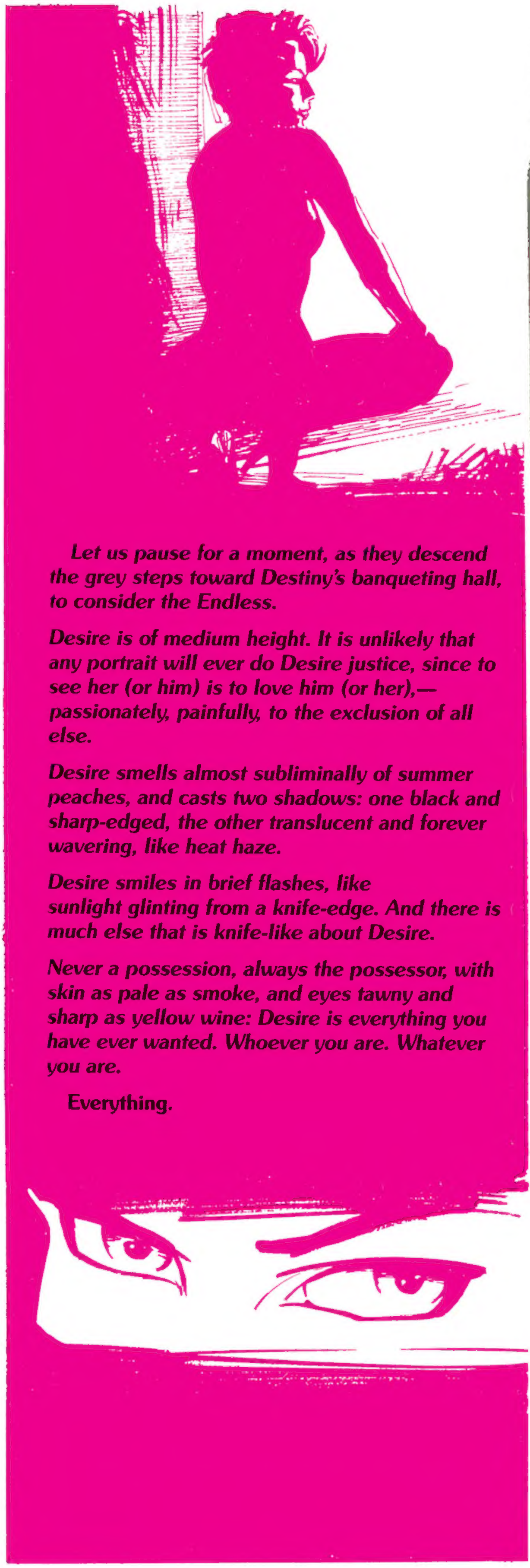
WE *ALL* MISS HIM.

I DON'T.

SISTER. YOUNGEST OF THE ENDLESS. I STAND IN MY GALLERY, AND I CALL YOU.

YOUR FAMILY *AWAITS* YOU. COME.

Um, HI.
IT'S, uh, ME.
ISN'T IT NICE... ALL OF US... TOGETHER LIKE THIS...
IT'S SO...
NICE...
HUSH, LITTLE SISTER.
NOW WE ARE ALL ASSEMBLED, WE WILL WALK DOWN TO THE REFECTORY. THERE ARE THINGS TO DISCUSS.
THERE IS SOMETHING I MUST SAY.
HI, SIS. HOW ARE YOU DOING?
UH. YESTERDAY I DID SOME REALLY BAD STUFF. I MEAN REAL BAD. YOU KNOW.
BUT TODAY I DID SOME GOOD THINGS. I DON'T KNOW.
YOU KNOW.
FOLLOW ME.



Despair, Desire's sister and twin, is queen of her own bleak bourne. It is said that scattered through Despair's domain are a multitude of tiny windows, hanging in the void. Each window looks out onto a different scene, being, in our world, a mirror. Sometimes you will look into a mirror and feel the eyes of Despair upon you, feel her hook catch and snag on your heart.

Her skin is cold, and clammy; her eyes are the colour of sky, on the grey, wet days that leach the world of colour and meaning; her voice is little more than a whisper; and while she has no odour, her shadow smells musky, and pungent, like the skin of a snake.

Let us pause for a moment, as they descend the grey steps toward Destiny's banqueting hall, to consider the Endless.

Desire is of medium height. It is unlikely that any portrait will ever do Desire justice, since to see her (or him) is to love him (or her),— passionately, painfully, to the exclusion of all else.

Desire smells almost subliminally of summer peaches, and casts two shadows: one black and sharp-edged, the other translucent and forever wavering, like heat haze.

Desire smiles in brief flashes, like sunlight glinting from a knife-edge. And there is much else that is knife-like about Desire.

Never a possession, always the possessor, with skin as pale as smoke, and eyes tawny and sharp as yellow wine: Desire is everything you have ever wanted. Whoever you are. Whatever you are.

Everything.

Many years gone, a sect in what is now Afghanistan declared her a goddess, and proclaimed all empty rooms her sacred places. The sect, whose members called themselves The Unforgiven, persisted for two years, until its last adherent finally killed himself, having survived the other members by almost seven months.

Despair says little, and is patient.

Destiny is the oldest of the Endless; in the Beginning was the Word, and it was traced by hand on the first page of his book, before ever it was spoken aloud.

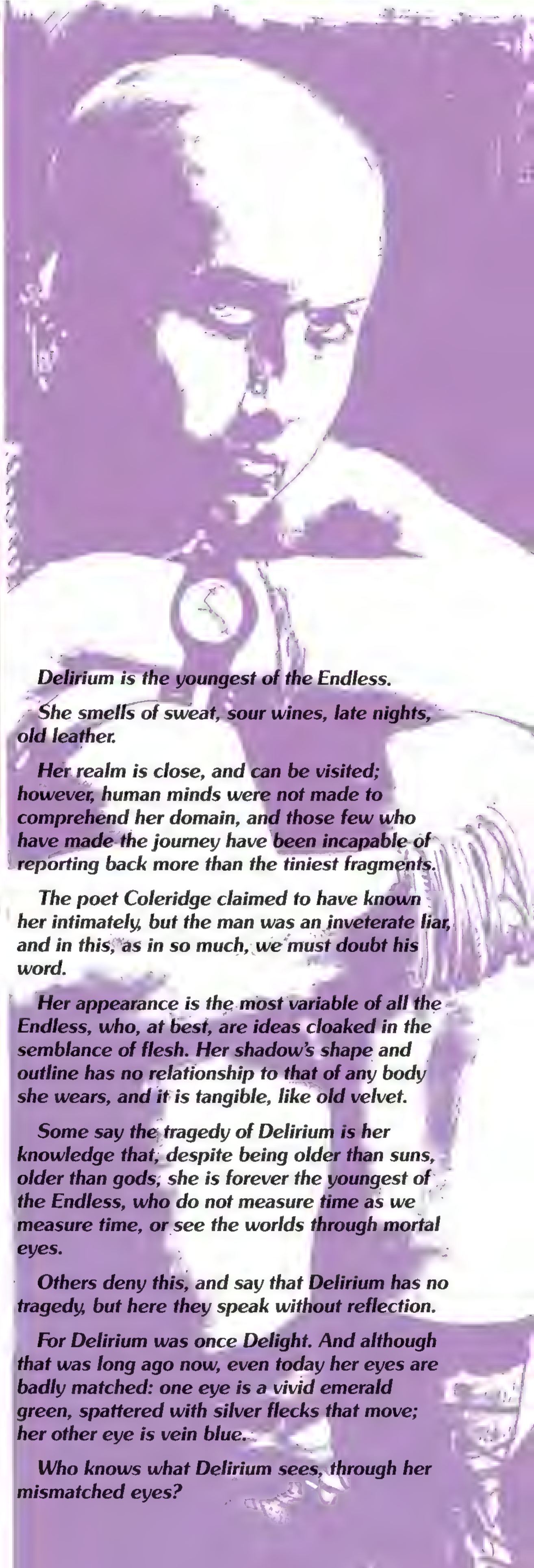
Destiny is also the tallest of the Endless, to mortal eyes.

There are some who believe him to be blind; whilst others, perhaps with more reason, claim that he has travelled far beyond blindness, that indeed, he can do nothing but *see: that he sees the fine traceries the galaxies make as they spiral through the void, that he watches the intricate patterns living things make on their journey through time.*

Destiny smells of dust and the libraries of night.

He leaves no footprints.

He casts no shadow.



Delirium is the youngest of the Endless.

She smells of sweat, sour wines, late nights, old leather.

Her realm is close, and can be visited; however, human minds were not made to comprehend her domain, and those few who have made the journey have been incapable of reporting back more than the tiniest fragments.

The poet Coleridge claimed to have known her intimately, but the man was an inveterate liar, and in this, as in so much, we must doubt his word.

Her appearance is the most variable of all the Endless, who, at best, are ideas cloaked in the semblance of flesh. Her shadow's shape and outline has no relationship to that of any body she wears, and it is tangible, like old velvet.

Some say the tragedy of Delirium is her knowledge that, despite being older than suns, older than gods, she is forever the youngest of the Endless, who do not measure time as we measure time, or see the worlds through mortal eyes.

Others deny this, and say that Delirium has no tragedy, but here they speak without reflection.

For Delirium was once Delight. And although that was long ago now, even today her eyes are badly matched: one eye is a vivid emerald green, spattered with silver flecks that move; her other eye is vein blue.

Who knows what Delirium sees, through her mismatched eyes?

Dream of the Endless: ah, there's a conundrum.

In this aspect (and we perceive but aspects of the Endless, as we see the light glinting from one tiny facet of some huge and flawlessly cut precious stone), he is rake-thin, with skin the color of falling snow.

Dream accumulates names to himself like others make friends; but he permits himself few friends.

If he is closest to anyone, it is to his elder sister, whom he sees but rarely.

He heard long ago, in a dream, that one day in every century Death takes on mortal flesh, better to comprehend what the lives she takes must feel like, to taste the bitter tang of mortality: that this is the price she must pay for being the divider of the living from all that has gone before, all that must come after.

He broods on this tale, but has never questioned her about its truth. Perhaps he fears that she would answer him.

Of all the Endless, save perhaps Destiny, he is most conscious of his responsibilities, the most meticulous in their execution.

Dream casts a human shadow, when it occurs to him to do so.

And there is Death.

I HAVE SENT FOR REFRESHMENTS.

IN THE MEANTIME, PLEASE, MAKE YOURSELVES COMFORTABLE.

WELL... HERE WE ALL ARE.

YES. HERE WE ALL ARE.

Uhh. YES. HERE WE...

Umm...

SOMETIMES I FORGET WHAT I WAS GOING TO SAY.

SOMETIMES I REMEMBER THINGS EVERYONE ELSE HAS FORGOTTEN FOR EVER AND ALWAYS. DOES THAT EVER HAPPEN TO YOU?

I SUPPOSE YOU MUST BE WONDERING WHY I CALLED YOU ALL HERE.

Yes.

THE THREE SISTERS VISITED MY GARDEN, EARLIER THIS DAY.

...TRIODITIS?

IN ONE ASPECT. THE GREY WOMEN.

THE FATES? *HERE?* THAT IS *INDEED* BIZARRE.

I MEAN... THIS PLACE *IS* FATE. IT SEEMS LIKE THE *LAST* PLACE THEY WOULD CHOOSE TO MANIFEST.

CHOOSE?

I JUST MADE BUTTER-FLIES. *LOOK*, EVERY-BODY! LOOK AT WHAT **I** JUST DID...

BUTTER... FLIES...

NO MATTER.

AS FOR WHAT THEY WANTED...

THEIR PRONOUNCEMENTS WERE, UNSURPRISINGLY, ORACULAR AND AMBIGUOUS.

I CONSULTED MY BOOK.

IT DESCRIBED MY ENCOUNTER WITH THE THREE. IT CLARIFIED MUCH THAT THEY DESCRIBED OBLIQUELY. SOMETHING **IMPORTANT** WILL HAPPEN. SOMETHING THAT SPARKS A CHAIN OF EVENTS, CAUSING MUCH CHANGE AND UPHEAVAL.

AND WHAT *IS* THAT OCCASION?

THIS MEETING.

THAT IS ALL.

Explain this further, my brother. WHAT must happen?

NO.

I HAVE TOLD YOU ALL I TELL YOU. I HAVE BROUGHT YOU ALL TO THIS PLACE.

THE REST IS UP TO THE FIVE OF YOU.

DRINK THE WINES. EAT OF THE FRUIT OF MY GARDEN. TALK.

IT HAS BEEN CENTURIES SINCE WE WERE ALL TOGETHER. WE MUST HAVE MUCH TO DISCUSS.

Um...

I MET THIS GUY IN THIS CLUB IN -- SOMEWHERE. THIS CLUB. LATE AT NIGHT. I DON'T KNOW WHERE IT WAS.

REAL PRETTY COLORS, THOUGH.

...PRETTY.

HE WANTED TO KISS ME. BUT I DON'T LIKE TO BE TOUCHED. SO I DID THIS STUFF TO HIM, SO HE SAW ONLY COLORS.

You are saying that you summoned us here because it is necessary for us to be here at this time.

EXACTLY.

This is foolish. I am currently rebuilding my kingdom. I have duties to attend to, and there is much that must be done.

I will leave now.

THAT WILL NOT HAPPEN, YET.

AW, C'MON. HANG AROUND FOR A LITTLE. WHAT'S SOME LOST TIME? WE'VE GOT ALL THE TIME THERE IS.

HAVE A GRAPE.

I LOST SOME TIME ONCE.

IT'S ALWAYS IN THE LAST PLACE YOU LOOK FOR IT.

I do not want a grape.

I COULD MAKE YOU WANT ONE.

careful, sibling.

I AM *DESIRE*, AM I NOT? THAT IS WHAT I *AM*; THAT IS WHAT I *DO*. I MAKE THINGS *WANT* THINGS.

WHERE I TOUCH, THINGS *WANT* AND *NEED* AND *LOVE*-- DRAWN TO THEIR OBJECTS OF DESIRE LIKE *BUTTERFLIES* TO A *CANDLE-FLAME*.

MOTHS.

YOU MEAN *MOTHS*.

BUTTERFLIES.

THEY'RE *YOURS* NOW, SISTER.

YES.

THOSE WERE *MINE*. YOU DIDN'T *HAVE* TO DO THAT! YOU REALLY DIDN'T HAVE TO DO THAT.

WE SHOULDN'T ARGUE. WE SHOULDN'T FIGHT. AFTER ALL-- *HERE* WE ALL ARE.

SHE'S RIGHT.

Perhaps. There is no reason why we can't converse civilly.

I MET THIS LITTLE GIRL AND SHE SAID SHE THOUGHT I WAS PRETTY. SHE WAS SO NICE.

SO I DID SOMETHING TO HER. SOMETHING SO SHE'LL ALWAYS BE HAPPY.

ALWAYS BE HAPPY FOR EVER AND EVER AND EVER.

WE NEVER ARGUED LIKE THIS WHEN *HE* WAS HERE. HE WOULD HAVE MADE A JOKE OR SOMETHING.

WE *AREN'T* ARGUING. *WHO'S* ARGUING? *I'M* NOT ARGUING.

WE'RE HAVING A *PERFECTLY CIVILIZED CONVERSATION*. WE'RE JUST TALKING.

ISN'T THAT *RIGHT*, DELIGHT?

DELIGHT WAS A LONG TIME AGO.

OOPS. SILLY ME.

I KNOW *LOTS* OF THINGS. THINGS ABOUT *US*. THINGS NOT EVEN *HE* KNOWS. *DO* YOU?

DON'T LAUGH AT ME, DESIRE. DON'T MAKE FUN OF ME. I KNOW WHAT YOU THINK ABOUT ME.

BUT I KNOW THINGS NONE OF YOU KNOW.

CALM YOURSELF, LITTLE SISTER.

I'M CALM.

GOD, I'M CALM.

SO LET'S JUST *TALK*.

This has no point. What have we to discuss?

WHAT HAVE WE TO DISCUSS? WELL, WHAT ABOUT *YOU*, MY BROTHER?

Me?

INDEED. TELL ME -- HOW'S YOUR LOVE LIFE? *KILLED* ANY *GIRLFRIENDS* RECENTLY? OR SENTENCED ANY MORE OF THEM TO *HELL*?

...what did you say?

WELL, YOU *DON'T* EXACTLY HAVE TROUBLE-FREE RELATIONSHIPS, *DO* YOU?

LET'S SEE... THERE WAS THAT LITTLE ONE IN GREECE, *WHAT* WAS HER NAME? *CAROUSEL?* SOMETHING LIKE THAT.

AND THAT *FEMALE* ON--*WHAT'S* THAT *PRETTY* PLANE WITH ALL THE *TWINKLY LIGHTS?* YOU KNOW WHERE I MEAN.

BUT WHAT YOU PUT *HER* THROUGH WASN'T *PRETTY* AT *ALL.*

OH-- AND I NEARLY *FORGOT.* DO YOU REMEMBER *NADA?*

You... dare...

SUCH A *SWEET* CHILD. SHE REALLY *LOVED* YOU--I *KNOW.* I COULD *TASTE* HER *HEART.*

AND WHAT DID *YOU* DO?

BECAUSE SHE WOULDN'T *STAY* WITH YOU UNTIL YOU *TIRED* OF HER, *YOU* SENTENCED HER TO *LUCIFER'S DOMAIN.*

BECAUSE SHE *HURT* YOUR PETTY *PRIDE,* YOU'VE HAD *HER HURT* AND *TORTURED* FOR *TEN THOUSAND YEARS...*

ENOUGH!

You have said ENOUGH, and MORE than ENOUGH. Why I should--

YOU WILL DO NOTHING IN *THIS* PLACE, MY BROTHER.

I believe I will go outside... my... brother.

I do not... care for the... company here.

WELL! WHAT'S THE MATTER WITH *HIM*?

DO YOU THINK IT COULD HAVE BEEN *SOMETHING* I SAID?

SHUT UP, DESIRE.

IF YOU *EVER* WANT TO SPEAK AGAIN...

SHUT UP.

YOU FEELING OKAY?

No.

No, I am not "feeling okay".

You HEARD what Desire said. HOW it addressed me. What it INSINUATED. What it implied. YOU HEARD.

If Destiny had not intervened, I would have...

YEAH. WELL, IT'S PROBABLY A GOOD JOB THAT DESTINY *DID* INTERVENE, THEN.

I MEAN, DESIRE WAS *JUST* TRYING TO GET YOU GOING. TRYING TO *UPSET* YOU. WASN'T THAT *OBVIOUS*?

Perhaps.

But none of you spoke out for me. When Desire talked of Nada that way...

Sister--you KNOW how I felt for Nada once. What I feel for her STILL. But she DEFIED me. I gave her due warning, and STILL she spurned me, so...

SO YOU SENTENCED HER TO HELL.

...yes.

DESIRE WAS RIGHT.

WHAT?

WELL, MAYBE NOT ABOUT *EVERYTHING*. BUT RIGHT ABOUT *NADA*, ANYWAY. YOU DID A *TERRIBLE* THING TO THAT POOR GIRL. YOU ACTED *APPALLINGLY*.

YOU TOO? Even YOU turn on me, my sister?

OH, JUST *SHUT UP* AND LET ME *FINISH*. YOU CAN *SHOUT* AT ME *AFTERWARDS*.

NADA *LOVED* YOU. SHE *REALLY DID*.

NOW, MAYBE *DESIRE* HAD MORE TO DO WITH THAT-- AND WITH *YOUR* REACTION TO NADA'S LOVE--THAN IT'S SAYING. *THAT* DOESN'T *MATTER*.

BECAUSE *NADA* WAS *RIGHT*.

IT *IS* BAD NEWS FOR *US* TO GET INVOLVED WITH *THEM*. *YOU* KNOW THAT.

I would have made her a goddess.

MAYBE SHE DIDN'T *WANT* TO BE A GODDESS, LITTLE BROTHER. DID YOU EVER CONSIDER *THAT*?

ANYWAY, CONDEMNING HER TO AN *ETERNITY IN HELL, JUST* BECAUSE SHE *TURNED YOU DOWN*...

...THAT'S A *REALLY* SHITTY THING TO DO.

OKAY, I'VE *FINISHED*. YOU CAN *SHOUT* AT ME NOW.

Is this how you feel? Truly? That I have not behaved fittingly? That I have been unjust?

YES.

Very well, then. My course is clear.

I had not wished to return to Hell. Not yet.

Lucifer Morningstar is not one to forgive a slight, nor to forget an injury.

But if I have committed a wrong, then I have but one course.

It must be made right.

I must go to my own realm, first, to prepare.

And then, though it might mean my doom, I must journey to Hell.

My sister, I pray you tell our siblings that I was needed elsewhere, and I could not stay.

Adieu.

YOU TOO.

HEY! DREAM?

My lady?

DON'T DO ANYTHING *STUPID*.

I am afraid it is too late for that admonition. But I shall do my best. I can do no more.

Either I shall bring Nada out of Hell...

...or I shall see you again soon, my sister.

See you for one final time.

IDIOT.

UM. HE SAID, *SORRY,* BUT HE HAD TO *TAKE OFF.*

SO, UH, MAYBE WE OUGHT TO *SIT* AND *TALK* SOME MORE. YOU KNOW, *WITHOUT* HIM.

TALK FURTHER, SISTER? THERE IS NO NEED.

HE IS RETURNING TO HELL.

IT HAS BEGUN.

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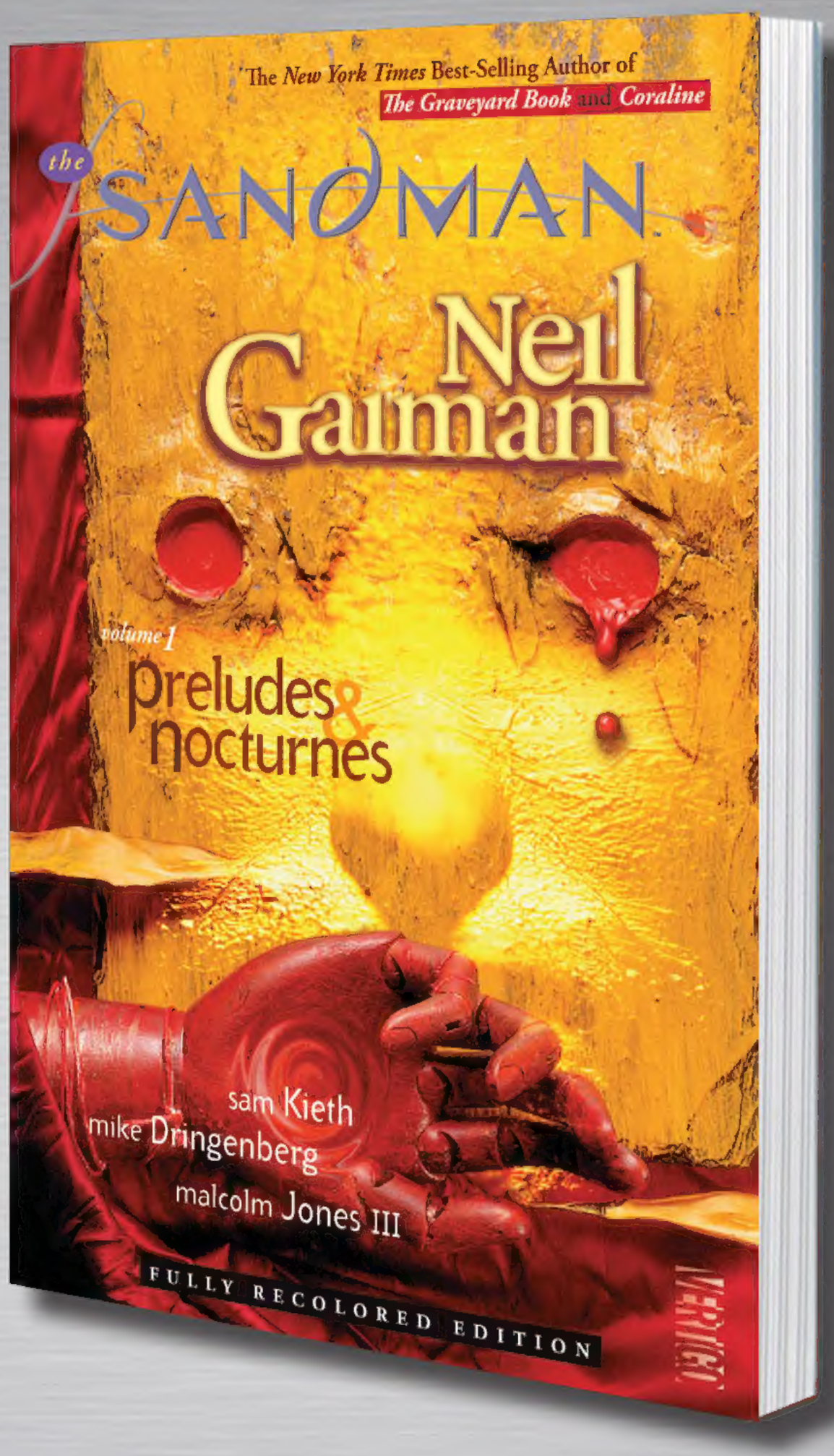

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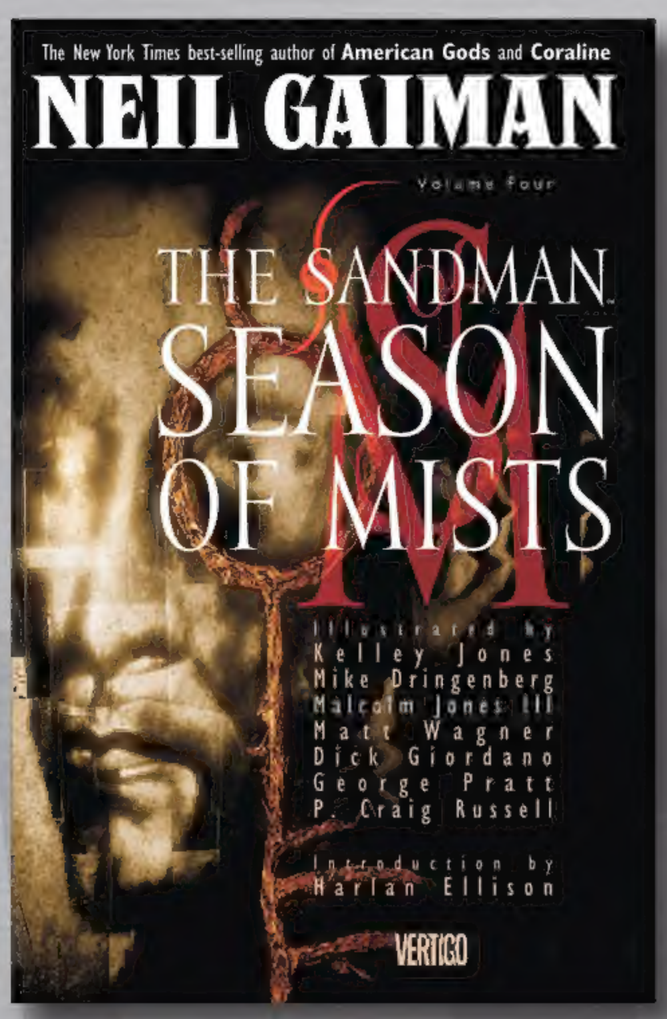

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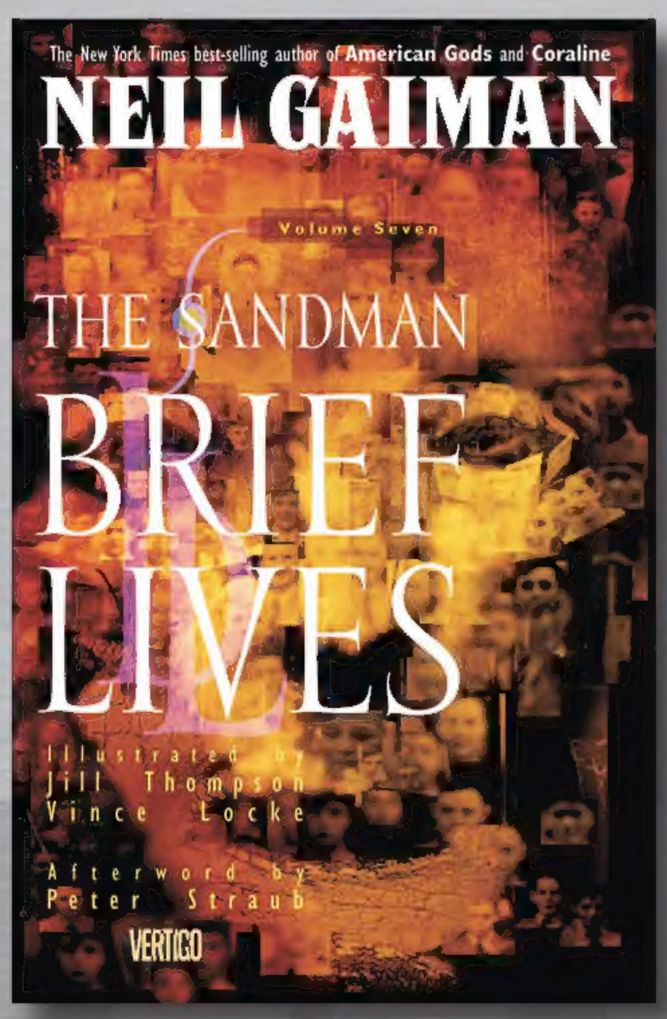

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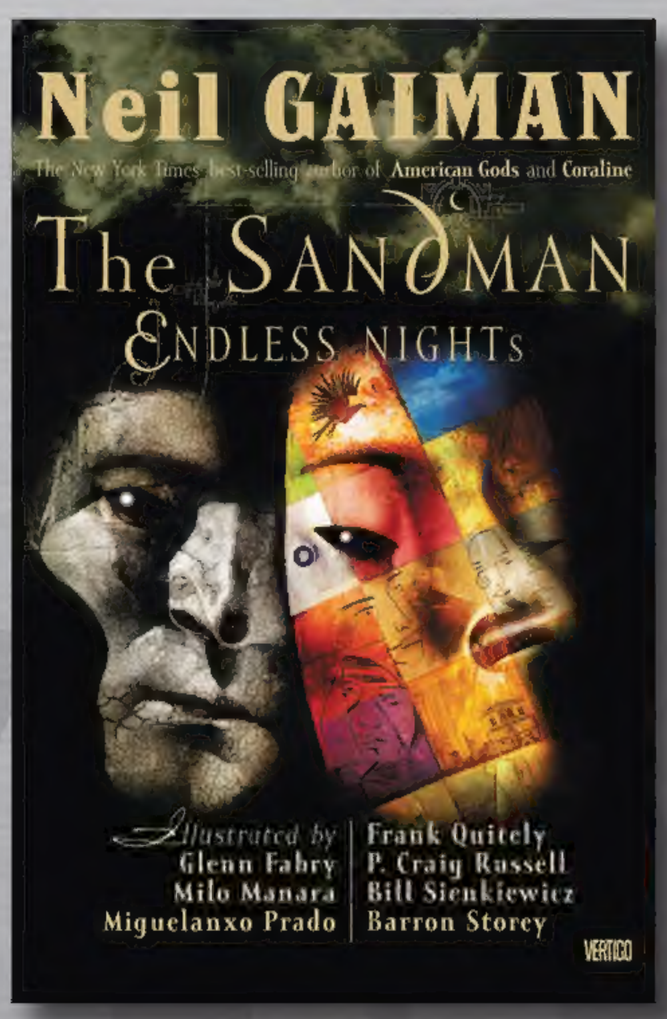

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